

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

106th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 147

May 26, 1999, 1:48 p.m.
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DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/New Base Closure Round

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2000 . . . S. 1059. McCain/Levin amendment No. 393.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 40-60

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 1059, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2000, will authorize a total of \$288.8 billion, which is \$8.3 billion more than requested by the Clinton Administration and which represents a 2.2-percent real increase in defense spending. Highlights include a 4.8-percent pay raise and a \$3.4 billion increase in military construction.

The McCain/Levin amendment would require the appointment of commissioners in 2001 for a new Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) to recommend to Congress in 2002 a list of military facilities to be realigned or closed. (Congress considers BRAC recommendations under expedited procedures and without amendment. There have been four previous BRAC rounds. The last round was particularly controversial due to charges that President Clinton politicized the process in an effort to influence voters in California and Texas.)

Those favoring the amendment contended:

Our defense forces have been drastically cut. Our bases for those forces have also been cut, but not by nearly as much. Maintaining bases is costly. We have more bases than we need for the remaining military forces that we have. The logical thing to do is to get rid of the excess capacity, which the Defense Department estimates at 23 percent. The problem, as it has been for previous base closure rounds, is that Members do not want any military facilities in their States closed. The citizens of their States believe that those facilities provide jobs to local communities and that if those facilities are closed, local economies will suffer. Our colleagues have many arguments against base closure rounds, but we think their main concern is to protect their bases.

The Defense Department estimates that if two more BRAC rounds are implemented savings of \$3.6 billion per year will be achieved. That extra money could be put to good use. It could be used for procurement, to increase training, to increase pay, or to pay for the costs of the war against Serbia.

(See other side)

YEAS (40)		NAYS (60)		NOT VOTING (0)	
Republicans (17 or 31%)	Democrats (23 or 51%)	Republicans (38 or 69%)	Democrats (22 or 49%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Ashcroft	Bayh	Abraham	Helms	Akaka	
Bond	Biden	Allard	Hutchinson	Baucus	
Chafee	Bryan	Bennett	Hutchison	Bingaman	
DeWine	Byrd	Brownback	Inhofe	Boxer	
Gramm	Feingold	Bunning	Lott	Breaux	
Grams	Harkin	Burns	Mack	Cleland	
Grassley	Hollings	Campbell	McConnell	Conrad	
Hagel	Kennedy	Cochran	Murkowski	Daschle	
Jeffords	Kerrey	Collins	Nickles	Dodd	
Kyl	Kerry	Coverdell	Roberts	Dorgan	
Lugar	Kohl	Craig	Sessions	Durbin	
McCain	Landrieu	Crapo	Shelby	Edwards	
Roth	Leahy	Domenici	Smith, Bob	Feinstein	
Santorum	Levin	Enzi	Snowe	Graham	
Smith, Gordon	Lieberman	Fitzgerald	Specter	Inouye	
Thompson	Lincoln	Frist	Stevens	Johnson	
Voinovich	Moynihan	Gorton	Thomas	Lautenberg	
	Reed	Gregg	Thurmond	Mikulski	
	Reid	Hatch	Warner	Murray	
	Robb			Sarbanes	
	Rockefeller			Schumer	
	Wellstone			Torricelli	
	Wyden				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:
1—Official Business
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:
AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

Some Senators have noted correctly that the costs of closing bases, particularly because of the mandates involved in environmental cleanup of those bases, have initially been exceeding the savings that have come from closures. However, those cleanup costs are going to have to be paid whether the bases are closed or not. The only difference is that when a base is closed the cleanup is accelerated and the costs are borne up-front. Other Senators have argued that the last base closing was politicized by President Clinton, and that therefore they are not about to agree to any base closing until he is gone. In response, we were sensitive to that concern in this amendment. The commission would not even be appointed until 2001, when we would have a new President.

The Defense Department estimates that the previous base closure rounds together will yield net savings of \$3.9 billion in the current fiscal year and will generate a steady \$5.6 billion per year when fully implemented. The Congressional Budget Office has a slightly lower estimate of \$5 billion per year, and the General Accounting Office concurs. We admit that the numbers are not exact, but we note they cannot be exact--it is very difficult to say how much money would have been spent on various activities without the previous BRAC rounds being implemented.

Every time we have gone through a base closure round Members have lobbied the closure commission to keep bases in their States open. We understand their concern. Local communities often feel that their prosperity is contingent upon those bases staying in operation. Interestingly enough, though, it turns out that this belief usually is not true. Communities around closed bases may suffer some initial economic shock, but they tend to rebound very well. In fact, most of those communities currently have stronger economies than the communities that managed to keep their military bases open. It appears, economically at least, that closing a military facility is good for the community in which it is located. We know this argument cannot remove the fact that the perception will always remain that base closures hurt communities, but it should temper Senators' votes--if they know any local harm will be temporary, they should be more willing to vote for base closures. We urge our colleagues to support this amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

Argument 1:

This amendment should be defeated for several reasons. First, we have no reason to believe that it will not be politicized. President Clinton perverted the last round for his own political gain by inventing the gimmick of "privatization in place." Thus, putting aside whether or not it is a good idea to have another round of closures, we believe that right now it is not possible to have a fair round of closures. Second, the previous rounds of base closures have proven that the savings are not as great as claimed, and it takes years for them to start to accrue due to the huge up-front costs of closures. The costs of shutting down bases, particularly from environmental mandates, are extreme. More than \$22 billion has been spent to date implementing the 4 previous BRAC rounds, and many of the projected savings have never materialized. Net savings are now, supposedly, starting to materialize, but we cannot be sure because the Defense Department has not set up any accounting systems to track them. If we were to implement two new rounds in 2001 and 2005 (as some Senators favor), the Defense Department estimates that it would not start seeing savings until 2008, and by 2015 it would have saved just \$21 billion. Fourth, we have not seen any analysis of why infrastructure needs to be reduced. We have seen the statistics showing the percentage reductions that have occurred in the number of ships, planes, and troops, and have been told that we have not had equal cuts in the number of bases. Why should there be parity? By way of analogy, if the number of players that could be on a football team were reduced, that would not mean that the size of stadiums would have to be reduced as well. Fifth, and along the same lines as the previous point, we believe that a very strong case can be made that closing more bases at this time, for national security reasons, would be a grave mistake. Our military forces are at approximately one-half the level that they were at in 1991 when we fought the Gulf War. They are stretched so thin right now just from the air war against Yugoslavia that for the first time in decades the United States does not have a carrier in the Pacific. Our ability to project force is further being hampered by the closing down and cutting back of overseas bases. All of our top military commanders have very bluntly told us that defense spending is going to have to be increased substantially if the United States is going to be able to protect its national security interests. If that spending is provided and our forces are rebuilt, we may well need the military bases we now have and then some. Having a base closure round now, to cut bases to match our currently inadequate defense forces, may just result in our having to assume much larger expenses to acquire new bases if we build our forces up to the level necessary to meet our national security needs. We find these arguments to be persuasive, and thus urge the rejection of this amendment.

Argument 2:

We agree that our base infrastructure needs to be reduced. However, we also agree with our colleagues who say that it cannot be reduced due to President Clinton's politicization of the last round of closures. Simply saying the commission will not be formed until 2001 does not avoid the problem of having this President influence the process. If this amendment were to pass, Defense Department personnel would immediately go to work putting together lists of bases to close and rationales for those closings to present to the commission when it is formed in 2001. Those lists would be subject to political distortions by Clinton Administration officials. Even if the Clinton Administration behaved reputably this time no one would believe that it had. It does not have credibility with this Congress. Therefore, discussions of new base closure rounds must be deferred until we have a new President.